

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CU-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11

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R 231455Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6628

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 5255

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT TS

SUBJECT: STUDENTS, TEACHERS, WORKERS TRIED FOR PLOTTING

1. SUMMARY: LARGE NUMBER MOSTLY YOUNG PEOPLE AWAIT VERDICT

AUG 24 AFTER TWO-WEEK TRIAL ON CHARGES PLOTTING AGAINST STATE SECURITY AND RELATED LESSER OFFENSES. PROSECUTION HAS EMPHASIZED STRONG MARXIST-LENINIST LEANINGS OF SOME AND CONTINUING LINK TO LEFTIST ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE. DEFENSE HAS TAKEN LINES THAT GOT HAS NOT PROVED ACTS IN FURTHERANCE OF PLOT, AND THAT LAW UNDER WHICH ORGANIZATIONS ARE DEEMED ILLEGAL IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL. SEVERAL EUROPEAN LAWYERS HERE FOR TRIAL CLAIMING OBSERVER STATUS ON BEHALF CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS HAVE BEEN EXPELLED FOLLOWING GOT CHARGES OF FALSE AND MALICIOUS REPORTING OF TRIAL IN FRENCH PRESS. END SUMMARY.

2. APPROXIMATELY 220 TUNISIANS OF WHOM ALMOST HALF ARE ABSENT FROM TUNISIA HAVE BEEN TRIED BY STATE SECURITY COURT AUGUST 5- CONFIDENTIAL

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20. PRECISE FIGURES ARE LACKING BUT DEFENDANTS APPARENTLY INCLUDE

LARGE NUMBER STUDENTS, PERHAPS TWNTY TEACHERS/PROFESSORS, AND SOME WORKERS. FORTY-FIVE ARE CHARGED WITH PLOTTING AGAINST SECURITY OF STATE, OTHERS WITH MAINTAINING AN "ILLEGAL" (READ: MARXIST-LENINIST) ORGANIZATION WITH BRANCHES ALL MAJOR TUNISIAN CITIES, DISTRIBUTING TRACTS DEFAMING HEAD OF STATE AND MEMBERS OF GOT, OR ASSISTING FOREGOING ACTIVITIES.

3. PROSECUTION LINKS DEFENDANTS TO OLD "PERSPECTIVWST" ORGANIZATIONS AND "SOCIALIST STUDY GROUP", WHO PUT OUT ANTI-GOT MAGAZINES "PERSPECTIVES" AND "L'OUVRIER TUNISIEN" IN PARIS. MAKES POINT THAT SOME OF DEFENDANTS ARE FORMER OFFENDERS, CONVICTED 1968 AND SUBSEQUENTLY PARDONED. APPARENTLY MOST OF CURRENT DEFENDANTS WERE ARRESTED NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1973 THOUGH SOME PICKED UP IN CONNECTION WITH STUDENT DISORDERS OF SPRING 1974. ALL EXCEPT 36 HAVE BEEN IN STATE OF PROVISIONAL LIBERTY PENDING TRIAL (EXCEPT THOSE WHO FLED COUNTRY).

4. DEFENDANTS, AND TRACTS CIRCULATED AS TRIAL OPENED, CLAIMED TORTURE BY POLICE. LE MONDE'S PRINTING THIS CHARGE AND ALLEGED FACTUAL ERRORS IN PAPER'S COVERAGE OF TRIAL, INSPIRED VIRULENT GOT-GUIDED PRESS REACTION AGAINST MALICIOUS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN TUNISIAN INTERNAL MATTER. ADVERSE PUBLICITY IN EUROPE APPARENTLY ALSO FOLLOWED EXPULSION BY GOT OF SEVERAL EUROPEAN LAWYERS HERE TO OBSERVE TRIAL AS REPRESENTATIVES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND SIMILAR GROUPS.

5. DEFENSE UNDERTAKEN BY OVER THIRTY MOSTLY BRIGHT YOUNG TUNISIANS, INCLUDING LEADING LIBERAL POLITICIANS, HAS EMPHASIZED THAT WHILE MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS TOOK PLACE, ACTS TO CARRY OUT PLOT AGAINST STATE SECURITY NOT PROVEN; AND THAT 1959 LAW UNDER WHICH MINISTER INTERIOR CAN WITHHOLD LEGALITY FROM SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS IS INCONSISTENT WITH FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION GUARANTEED BY CONSTITUTION (WHICH, HOWEVER, GUARANTEES FREEDOM WITHIN CONDITIONS OF LAW).

6 COMMENT: IMPORTANT ASPECT OF TRIAL LOCALLY IS ITS SURFACING AGAIN OF ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE AND POLITICAL SUPPRESSION. OUR CONTACTS IN SURETE HAVE BEEN TENSE ABOUT TRIAL, INTERPRETING FACT THAT TRACTS CIRCULATED EVEN AS TRIAL BEGAN AS PROOF OF EXISTENCE OF CONTINUING, EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION, WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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FOREIGN CONNECTIONS, WORKING AGAINST INTERESTS OF GOT. TIMING OF TRIAL UNFORTUNATE IN VIEW OF HEAVY POLITICAL PRESSURE TO KEEP EVERYTHING RUNNING SMOOTHLY FOR THE PARTY CONGRESS NEXT MONTH, BUT PRESUMABLY GOT DID NOT WISH DELAY UNTIL DATE WHEN UNIVERSITY TUNIS WOULD BE BACK IN SESSION. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHAT DEGREE OF PUBLICITY EXPELLED FOREIGN OBSERVERS MANAGE TO GENERATE ABROAD.

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